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HOW SHALL WE TEACH THE LIFE OF CHRIST TO SUNDAY-SCHOOL CLASSES?

I. A COLLEGE PROFESSOR'S EXPERIENCE WITH AN ADULT BIBLE CLASS

The class consisted of young and middle-aged men of varied social position and widely differing degrees of culture. It included a physician, a civil engineer, and an architect, a number of college and theological seminary students, and a larger number of business men, mechanics, and office employees. The great majority were professing Christians. The enrolment was about forty, the average attendance about twenty-five.

The purpose was to test the practicability of securing from such a class genuine effort and real achievement in biblical study, and in particular some definite and coherent knowledge of the life of Jesus obtained chiefly by their own persistent effort.

The chief problem was to select a plan of work that would arouse the interest and secure the co-operation of all. This was no easy task where there was no homogeneity of education, culture, or experience. It is a well-established pedagogical principle that one's capacity to take a further step in the comprehension of a subject is limited by his existing experience; that the new idea must first be translated into terms of that experience in order to be comprehended. This would seem to render impossible the organization and presentation of material so as to adjust it to such varied experience; and without such adjustment there could be no real interest, no permanent incentive to effort.

The solution of the problem was found in leveling down the work required to the capacity of the least cultured, and at the same time selecting a piece of work so well worth doing, so intrinsically valuable, promising such a genuine increase of knowledge, and practical power over the biblical material, as to arouse a strong desire to accomplish it.

In the adjustment of the work to the capacity of the least cultured, certain conditions were obviously imperative. First, the mental

powers appealed to must be such as not to require extensive culture for their efficient exercise. Second, the ultimate goal of effort must be perfectly clear and perfectly comprehensible, while its practical value must be evident to all. Third, the task assigned each week must be simple and specific. By "simple" is meant that no demand for abstract thought, difficult interpretation, looking up of references, or preparing written work could be permitted. To complicate the task by including any one of these demands would have been practically certain to reduce the actual workers to a small minority of the class. Fourth, the specific work of the teacher must fit into and supplement the work of the class, so that the joint product would constitute a whole to which each would contribute an essential part.

The life of Jesus as presented in the gospels is most admirably adapted to fulfil these conditions. As a subject of study, it presents, roughly speaking, two elements in indissoluble connection—a record of doings, and a record of teachings; and, roughly speaking, the writer defined the work of the class by the first, and his own work as teacher by the second, of these elements. That is to say, the task outlined for the class was to master the facts of the life of Jesus in their chronological order and in their geographical setting, i. e., to know the facts in their *external* relations; while that reserved for the teacher was to reveal, as far as he was able, the *internal* relations of the facts, to interpret their significance in the developing life of Jesus, and to expound the teachings which were the natural expression of that life.

The work outlined for the class satisfactorily fulfilled the conditions referred to above. The mental activity demanded was simply that of the understanding and the memory, and the end to be achieved was exactly defined and perfectly comprehensible to all. The task each week was a perfectly definite portion of the whole, uncomplicated by any further requirement, and, consequently, was perfectly understood; and, lastly, the work of the teacher was the necessary supplement designed to show the inner relations of cause and purpose which conditioned the outer relations of time and place, and to fill them with their true meaning.

The method used was as follows: A harmony of the gospels was selected as a textbook, and every student supplied with a copy at

the expense of the class. A good map of Palestine was hung where everyone could plainly see it: In the first part of each lesson period the students were tested as to the accuracy and thoroughness of their work. The events and discourses, as indicated by the titles of the harmonist, were reviewed from the beginning by passing around the class from man to man, thus requiring each to review the whole so as to be ready with his contribution in turn; and, again, by sending different men to the map with a pointer and requiring them to review the whole series in its local setting; and, further, by questions intended to test the comprehension of the teacher's exposition and interpretation. In the latter part of the lesson period the teacher took up the particular event or discourse under immediate consideration, defined its relation to its predecessor, and interpreted its meaning.

What was the result? The work grew in difficulty as it proceeded, but it grew in interest also, for many reasons. The fact that order and coherence were appearing out of the confused jumble of their previous knowledge of the gospels, the clear ideas of time and place and meaning as they heard or read the gospels or gospel allusions, the growing pride of acquisition and consciousness of mastery, the strategic value of this outlook, this articulation of facts, for an attack upon the whole problem of gospel history, and, above all, the growing reality and richness of that matchless life and teaching—all these were practical incentives and led to sustained effort through two years to the completion of the task. A remark of the civil engineer is typical of many expressions. He said: "I have been in the Sunday school for twenty years, and I have never learned anything till now." Not all completed the task, but all did some real work, and several could at the close step to the map and give the complete articulated outline of gospel history without an error as to time or place.

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II. A PASTOR'S SUGGESTIONS ON TEACHING BOYS

In planning a course of study for boys on the life of Jesus, there are some general and special facts of their development that need to be considered. These facts can be only summarized here.

One of the general laws of boy-life is the law of interest. The